The Significance of the Albemarle Park Landscape

The landscape design and site plan of Albemarle Park is as significant as the special architectural design of the Manor and the Cottages.

Albemarle Park did not grow by happenstance, as many historic neighborhoods did, where each lot was independently developed and built upon over many years' time.

It was designed as a single piece, a "residential park," with careful thought given to integrating all elements of architecture and landscape. The manner in which each cottage was sited on the land, the type and placement of each tree and shrub, the curves and intersections of the footpaths and roads - these and all other landscape factors are significant features that contribute to the uniqueness of Albemarle Park in the history of Asheville's neighborhoods.

By the conclusion of the nineteenth century there had developed a strong belief in the healthful benefits of pleasing landscapes and serene gardens. Parks and gardens were considered to be essential to humankind's well-being.

Samuel Parsons, Jr., the landscape architect who contributed his skills to the design of Albemarle Park, spent his entire life pursuing the goals of natural land-scape and park design best exemplified by New York City's Central Park, and the work of Frederick Law Olmsted.

He was the son of a horticulturist in Queens, New York, and, in the early years of his professional career, he worked in partnership with the renowned Calvert Vaux.

For eleven years, he was the landscape architect of the City of New York, designing many of the public parks that complemented Central Park, which he protected from numerous attempts at commercial development.

Parsons' contributions to landscape design span the country from the Mall in Washington, D.C. which he designed to the many college campuses and neighborhoods he planned.

Another lasting contribution he made was as one of the founders of the American Society of Landscape Architects. He gathered together the initial group of founders in his New York office and served as the ASLA's second president.

Parsons' thoughts on landscape are described in great detail in one of his several books, "How to Plan the Home Grounds," published in 1899.

He devotes an entire chapter entitled "Residential Parks" to his plan for Albemarle Park, describing the challenges he faced designing for the mountainside site, and detailing the methods he chose to take best advantage of its special qualities.

At the time Samuel Parsons was seeing Albemarle Park reach fruition, another great landscape architect was also working in Asheville. Frederick Law Olmsted, after designing the Biltmore Estate grounds, was developing the master plan for Biltmore Village, pursuing the same goals as Parsons. He was working with architect Richard Sharp Smith to integrate all archi-tectural and landscape design elements, just as Parsons had worked with Bradford Gilbert in Albemarle Park.

Unlike Biltmore Village, though, which has suffered quite a bit of change to its original plan through the years, Albemarle Park remains virtually completely intact. The tender saplings that were planted years ago are now towering oak and spruce trees, contributing to the full maturation of Parsons' original plan. The original cottages remain and the new cottages that have been built since 1913 respect the original intent of Parsons' design.

These guidelines have been developed to ensure the preservation of Parsons' original intent yet not imprison us in the past.

Archeological Resources

Any archeological resource lying within the Albemarle Park Local Historic District boundaries cannot be materially altered, restored, moved, or demolished unless a Certificate of Appropriateness has been issued.

An archeological resource is defined as material evidence of past human activity which is found below the surface of the ground or water, portions of which may be visible above the surface.

Property owners are required to contact the Historic Resources Commission upon discovery of any archeological resources.